

# NIMITZ NEWS

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## DAILY DIGEST



STORY BY MC3 PHIL LADOUCEUR

“FOR THE DEAD AND THE LIVING,

**WE MUST BEAR WITNESS.”**

- ELIE WIESEL

**A**pril 8 is Holocaust Remembrance Day, a part of the Holocaust Days of Remembrance, April 7-14. The day marks the anniversary of the Warsaw ghetto uprising, and invites people to reflect on the history of the Holocaust in order to

prevent it from happening again.

From 1933 to 1945, Nazi Germany and its collaborators were responsible for the deaths of more than six million Jews. Millions of others were also persecuted, tortured, and killed.

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Those others included homosexuals, the physically and mentally disabled, political dissidents, Roma, Jehovah's Witnesses, Poles, and Soviet prisoners of war. Many other groups were also terrorized, and even Nazis who fell out of favor or disgraced themselves in some way could end up in a concentration camp.

All of those deaths are difficult to comprehend, and the Holocaust was an event in history that words literally could not describe. The Polish-Jewish lawyer Raphael Lemkin had to invent the word 'genocide' to do so.

A few years ago I had the privilege to visit Auschwitz. The camp, now a museum, contains exhibitions and historical artifacts. The exhibitions are educational and set up in the buildings where the horrible events took place. You read about how they put three prisoners in a three-foot by three-foot cell and left them until they died. When you look up from reading, you are looking into the cell.

The most impressive thing I learned was that the people who were subject to Nazi brutality may have been victimized, but this did not make them victims. There were amazing acts of resistance, such as when a group of Jewish prisoners managed to blow up one of the crematoriums. You can read letters passed between prisoners and villagers who lived in the surrounding villages, trying to help in what small ways they could. These gestures of defiance against the Nazis must have been like struggling against a tsunami. And they did it anyway.

And the artifacts from time are impossibly saddening. There is nothing like the feeling of combined horror, humility and sorrow you feel while looking at a pile of human hair next to rugs that are woven from it. Or a pile of glasses, taken from their owners and piled high like a dragon's



treasure. Or a mountain of luggage, each with a name and place of origin written on the side. A brown suitcase stuck out at me, the name painted in white: Marie Kafka, from Prague, a city I had just visited.

All I have in common with Marie Kafka are Prague and Auschwitz, and I will never forget her name.

What has always frightened me about the Holocaust is how many inside of German society at the time saw nothing wrong with what was happening. It would be understandable if Nazi camp commandants tried to destroy the evidence. But some, such as Josef Kramer, commandant of the Belsen camp, were proud of their work. When the British captured Kramer, he gave speeches about the efficiency of his establishment and noted especially his own contributions. And he was ultimately hung as war criminal on the basis of those proud speeches.

The Days of Remembrance are a time for all of us to reflect on these horrific events and consider how so many people doing evil could convince themselves they were doing good. How so many people could turn their eyes away and ignore what was happening. And how if just a few more hadn't turned away, and a few more had raised their voices, how many would have lived.

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“THE HOLOCAUST WAS  
NOT ONLY A JEWISH TRAGEDY,  
BUT A **HUMAN**  
TRAGEDY.”

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-SIMON WIESENTHAL

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**Cover Photo:** Recently liberated survivors in the Woebbelin concentration camp support and help each other.

**Previous Page:** A group of survivors sits outside a barracks in the newly liberated Dachau concentration camp.

**This Page:** General Dwight D. Eisenhower and other high-ranking U.S. Army officials view the bodies of prisoners killed by the German camp authorities during the evacuation of the Ohrdruf concentration camp.